



**Worship Series: “Steps to Stewardship: The Gratitude Path”**

“Cheerful Giving”—Sermon Text: 2 Corinthians 9:1-15

FUMC Arlington, Texas 76011

22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost: 16 October 2016

“Early morning cheerfulness can be extremely obnoxious”

(--William Feather).

or

“Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from a religious conviction”

(--Blaise Pascal).

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In honor of Music Appreciation Sunday I quote Martin Luther:

Music makes people kindlier, gentler, more staid and reasonable. I am strongly persuaded that after theology there is no art that can be placed on a level with music; for besides theology, music is the only art capable of affording peace and joy of the heart . . . the devil flees before the sound of music as much as before the Word of God (from a Brian Bauknight sermon).

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Hear God’s word and listen for what the Spirit is saying to the church:

9 Now it is not necessary for me to write you about the ministry to the saints, 2 for I know your eagerness, which is the subject of my boasting about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year; and your zeal has stirred up most of them. 3 But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you may not prove to have been empty in this case, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be; 4 otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—in this undertaking.[a] 5 So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you, and arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that you have promised, so that it may be ready as a voluntary gift and not as an extortion.

6 The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. 9 As it is written,

“He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor;  
his righteousness[b] endures forever.”

10 He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your

seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.[c] 11 You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; 12 for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. 13 Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, 14 while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. 15 Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift (2 Corinthians 9)!

Our lesson today, 2 Corinthians 9:1-15, many call a text on “Cheerful Giving.” By way of summary it is a lesson that tells us about Paul urging the Church at Corinth to take part in the collection for the saints or believers in Jerusalem. Paul asks them to do so generously!

Paul’s concern in chapters 8 and 9 of 2 Corinthians focus fully on the collection for Jerusalem churches. Given the repetition about this collection in a variety of places that refer to it, it is no wonder that many readers believe it is possible that Paul has written in several epistles about this matter. Perhaps later editors join some letters here. Whatever the case, 2 Corinthians 9 encourages generous giving. “The ministry to the saints” (2 Corinthians 9:1) refers to the collection itself.

With reference to 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, Paul employs the Macedonian churches’ generosity as a means to spur the Corinthians to a better degree of charity. In 2 Corinthians 9:2-3, Paul writes that it is his boasting of Corinthian generosity that has created great generosity in the Macedonians. Now he urges the Corinthians to live up to his testimony. Paul’s rhetoric reflects antiquity’s honor/shame culture. Paul suggests neither the Corinthian church nor he wants to suffer humiliation—so they better kick it in. Many if not most expect generosity from them.

If they do not deliver, others may see them as selfish or unfeeling in the face of human need. I remember a similar tactic to this of Paul’s by some local fundraisers in Ireland some years ago: The American industrialist, Henry Ford, was once asked to donate money for the construction of a new medical facility. The billionaire pledged to donate \$5,000. The next day in the newspaper, the headline read, “Henry Ford contributes \$50,000 to the local hospital.” The irate Ford was on the phone immediately to complain to the fund-raiser that

he had been misunderstood. The fund-raiser replied that they would print a retraction in the paper the following day to read, “Henry Ford reduces his donation by \$45,000.” Realizing the poor publicity that would result, the Ford agreed to the \$50,000 contribution in return for the following: That above the entrance to the hospital was to be carved the biblical inscription: “I came among you and you took me in” (Bits & Pieces, March 3, 1994, Page 1-2).

At the heart of this coaxing letter’s section, Paul twice circles back to the theme that the Corinthians’ contribution should be voluntary. They should not feel pressured or extorted. “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7), as Paul writes. Paul suggests that not even he would or should force anyone into generosity.

Last of all, Paul ponders spiritually on his request. He writes to the church at Corinth that God promises to provide the channel for the Corinthian liberality. Using Isaiah 55:10 to drive home the point, Paul writes: “He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness” (2 Corinthians 9:10).

How can one give joyfully? In part this can be addressed by what Paul writes: “You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God” (2 Cor 11-12).

Max Lucado has written: “The presence of fear does not mean you have no faith. Fear visits everyone. But make your fear a visitor and not a resident.” Each time we open our hand to the poor or to the church in true heartfelt generosity, then we show a courage that we may not even know we had. And it becomes habit forming.

Paul is writing that if we give corresponding to the law of harvest, God will give back to us. Paul even suggests this form: “Our generous act will rouse gratitude in others to whom we give.” Would it not be wonderful if we could see gratitude in our church. It would be ideal compensation for our generous giving, to see many other people helped, blessed, and moved—so much so—that they would want to give thanks for our generosity.

An old legend tells of a man who comes across the barn where Satan stores the seeds he scatters across the earth. The man noticed that the most abundant seed in the barn was the seed of discouragement. He asked Satan about that seed. Satan said, “Yes, that is my most effective seed. It is a seed that will grow almost anywhere.”

Then with a sad look on his face, Satan added, “However, there is one place that the seed of discouragement will not grow.”

“Where is that?” asked the man.

“The seed of discouragement will not grow in the heart of gratitude.

Sometimes preaching seems to simply offer a lot of words and perhaps a great deal of hot air. Yet no less a luminary and wise thinker, Abraham Lincoln, has a sage comment on the sermon as composed and preached. As you may know, Lincoln often attended the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church near the White House during his presidency. He was once leaving an evening service when one of his assistants asked him what he thought of the service. “Well the content was excellent and Dr. Gurley spoke with great eloquence. It was obvious that he put a great deal of work into the sermon.”

“Then you thought it was a great sermon, Mr. President?”

“No, I did not say that.”

“But Sir, you said it was an excellent sermon”

Lincoln replied, “No, I said the content was excellent and that the preacher spoke with great eloquence. But Dr. Gurley, on this night, forgot one important matter. He forgot to ask us to do something great (Rex Bevens, 2 April 1994)!

With God’s help this is our daily task: “To do something great.”